

## The Dermatology Foundation: Partnerships and Programs Focused on the Future

**T**he Dermatology Foundation was founded in 1964 by 10 widely recognized leaders in our field who were concerned about the long-term advancement of the specialty. The founders wanted to form a foundation that would provide a major source of funding to encourage the development of new, full-time academicians, researchers, and dermatology departments across the United States. They recognized that to be successful the foundation needed the participation of the entire dermatologic community and industry.

Thanks to modest start-up funds donated by a prominent practicing dermatologist, three societies, and a laboratory, the Foundation became a reality. True to the founders' shared vision, dermatologists embraced its purpose, and by the end of 1966 physician memberships of \$15 to \$25 totaled over 550. The Foundation awarded its first six departmental grants of \$5,000 the following year and three \$10,000 fellowships to aspiring basic scientists two years later.

Over the next 25 years, the Foundation strengthened its focus on supporting individuals who would be tomorrow's leaders in the classroom and the laboratory. As Foundation individual, society, and corporate contributions gradually grew, so did its research funding program. By the end of the 1980s, the organization was able to support 44 grants and fellowships totaling \$800,000 and start an endowment fund for future research needs.

In 1989, the Foundation's funding capacity was stepped up with the introduction of Leaders Society annual memberships of \$1,000. With the help of these devoted members, the Foundation initiated three-year career development awards (CDAs). Physician giving continued to expand with the establishment of the Annenberg Circle (AC) in 1994, followed by the AC Sustaining annual giving membership and, finally, the Fitzpatrick Legacy Fund.

For the past 21 years, the synergy among individual, society, and corporate giving to the Foundation has been strong, dynamic, and immediate. Total Foundation contributions rose from \$1.0 million in 1990 to \$6.0 million in 2011. Each year, through the hard work of nearly 200 devoted physician volunteers, the organization raises approximately half of its support from individual members and a similar sum from its corporate and society partners. Membership in the Leaders Society has reached 1,040; AC and AC Sustaining now total 548, and the Fitzpatrick Legacy Fund stands at 11 members. Among its 51 society and corporate supporters, three companies continue to contribute \$500,000 or more each year as Cornerstone Benefactors.

As resources grew over the years, the Foundation maintained its mission to bring talented people to the forefront and further their early career development. The original program, which supported those who sought careers as basic scientists (i.e., MDs, MD/PhDs, and PhDs), was broadened to include individuals building careers in clinical investigation, teaching, procedural dermatology, pediatric dermatology, dermatopathology, outcomes-based research, epidemiology, human appearance, health-care policy, and medical dermatology. Today the Foundation supports 70 such individuals with a variety of research awards totaling \$3.2 million.

Has the Dermatology Foundation been successful in its work to identify and support the future leaders who have chosen the study of skin in health and disease? Indeed it has. Periodically, it tracks the career outcome of those who have received funding; the results of the latest study were recently published (Boris *et al.*, 2012). Recipients of three-year CDAs in all categories from 1990 to 2007 were surveyed with respect to career status, employment history, professional rank, and record of independent research funding. Of the 181 CDA recipients identified, 80% currently hold full- or part-time positions in academic medicine. These individuals include 46 assistant professors, 41 associate professors,

18 professors, and 7 division or department chairs. Eighty-four percent of respondents indicated that they had received subsequent independent research funding, and 95 individuals have received federal funding (235 federal grants awarded to date with funding exceeding \$318 million). Thus, the approximately \$30 million invested in the early careers of these promising individuals resulted in at least a 10-to-1 return of research funds to dermatology.

The recent success of CDA recipients in the intense competition for Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Awards for Medical Scientists is impressive and provides another sign of the Foundation's effectiveness. These prestigious early career research grants are available to young physician/scientists. Of the 62 grants provided in this category in the United States since 2007, five were awarded to recipients of Foundation CDAs.

Since its start, the Foundation has been an extraordinary success, benefiting our field and our patients. Although other organizations support research in dermatology, the Dermatology Foundation is perhaps the best example of the power of cooperation and synergy among practicing dermatologists, industry, and the greater academic community; each has a clear and firm understanding that the development of young leaders ensures the continuous creation of new knowledge. It is this new knowledge that guarantees the future of the practice of dermatology, enables the development of new agents that benefit patients, and keeps the specialty on the cutting edge of all of medicine.

With the combined support of its constituencies, the Foundation has developed a compelling and effective funding program that attracts enthusiastic support, identifies and supports those who will lead dermatology forward, and improves the health of those for whom we care. We hope that all who read this editorial are or will become supporters of the mission of the Dermatology Foundation and

help maintain the balance and unity that have enabled this important funding source to flourish.

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### REFERENCE

Boris C, Lessin SR, Wintroub BU *et al.* (2012) A retrospective analysis of the Dermatology Foundation's career development award program. *J Am Acad Dermatol* 67:969–74

### Editor's Note

Through the Dermatology Foundation, a large and gratifying mixture of private practitioners, academicians, and industry partners have provided very substantial support to beginning dermatologic investigators. Many research careers and many important discoveries can be directly attributed to this critical support. In turn, these investigators and their findings have improved clinical care and informed the development of new therapies. This is the very embodiment of unity within the dermatologic community.

**Barbara A. Gilchrest, MD**  
*Editor*